

UNCLAS MAPUTO 000681

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S - HTREGER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MOZAMBIQUE: FRELIMO WINS MAYORAL BY-ELECTION;
RENAMO CLAIMS FRAUD, INTIMIDATION

¶1. (U) The ruling Frelimo party came out ahead of Renamo, the lead opposition party, in the May 21 by-election for mayor in the northern town of Mocimboa da Praia, Cabo Delgado province. According to official results released on May 26 the Frelimo candidate, Amadeu Pedro, won with 53 percent (5,258 votes), defeating the Renamo candidate, Saide Assane, who garnered 47 percent (4,725 votes). There were no other candidates in the race. Voter turnout was higher this time than in the municipal elections of November 2003 (also won by Frelimo) - roughly 56 percent of eligible voters compared to 44 percent then. However, the results were not as close as those of the 2003 mayor race, in which Frelimo narrowly beat Renamo by 51 to 49 percent. The by-election was called to fill the vacancy left after the Frelimo mayor's death in October of last year. Interestingly, Frelimo's Pedro was once a member of the opposition, serving as the first Renamo delegate in Mocimboa da Praia in the 1990's. Some observers believe his knowledge of Renamo was a leading factor in Frelimo choosing him as its candidate in a municipality where Renamo has considerable support.

¶2. (SBU) Immediately after the final results were announced, Renamo demanded that they be annulled, alleging fraud and intimidation. Earlier, in a May 22 press release, Renamo claimed that dishonest polling station staff deliberately invalidated over 500 Assane votes. (Comment: Renamo's claims resemble allegations after the 2004 nationwide general elections - that polling station staff had deliberately nullified thousands of votes for Renamo candidates. Though instances of ballot sabotage did occur in 2004, the level was well below Renamo's claims. End comment.)

¶3. (SBU) Renamo's press release also alleged police intimidation, stating that a "massive" police presence combined with the visit of Interior Minister Jose Pacheco to Mocimboa da Praia served as "an affront to the freedom of citizens to exercise their right to vote without coercion." It added that police detained Renamo members and sympathizers, including four Renamo officials. According to press reports, two Renamo-appointed election officials and two Renamo deputies were detained for unlawful presence during the vote count the evening of May 21. (Note: Mozambican electoral law states that only polling station staff and accredited political party agents, journalists and observers are allowed present at the polling station during the vote count. End Note.) In addition, Embassy contacts in the area reported that one man was hospitalized after being hit by a rubber bullet fired by police. His condition was not considered grave, and he has since been released from the hospital.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Impartial contacts have told us they do not believe there were enough irregularities to influence the final outcome of the election. It is clear that tension between these two long-time political rivals remains high, despite Renamo's perceived loss of influence following its dismal showing in the 2004 nationwide general elections.
La Lime